

Legal identity for all: Why we need to link CRVS and ID management systems



Mumbai, India. Photo: © Simone D. McCourtie/World Bank

Proof of legal identity is one of the most important things you can own. It unlocks access to basic services and empowers you to exercise your rights. It helps you open a bank account, claim benefits, travel, seek legal protection, and more.

Yet it is estimated that more than [1 billion people](#) worldwide have no way of proving their identity. This puts them at greater risk of poverty, statelessness, exploitation, and abuse. It also prevents countries from delivering services efficiently and fostering growth.

Providing identity for all is fundamental to several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and an [SDG target](#) in its own right. We need to redouble efforts if we're to achieve it by 2030.

Who are the 1 billion lacking ID?

There are several factors that affect a person's inclusion in their national ID register:

Geography

More than 90% of the 1 billion people who don't have ID live in low- or lower-middle-income countries. Some of these countries have no ID system. Many have an ID system that covers an insufficient proportion of the population and uses a paper-based, decentralized approach that leads to incomplete and duplicate records.

Age

[Close to half](#) of people without ID are younger than the national ID age, which is 16 to 18 years in most low- and middle-income countries. Ideally, a person's identity should begin at birth. But ID registration begins much later in most of these countries. This affects services for children and increases the risk of exploitation, identity theft, and fraud.

Gender

The global gender gap for ID is [less than 2%](#). But in low-income countries, [1 in 2 women](#) lacks proof of legal identity, compared to 1 in 3 men. ID is critical to achieving gender equality and empowering women and their children.

Income

The poor are often excluded from ID registration. In low-income countries, [45% of the poorest fifth](#) of the population do not have ID, compared to 28% of the richest fifth.

Citizenship and ethnicity

Some countries have ID systems that discriminate against non-citizens or people of certain ethnicities. For example, citizenship is based on ethnicity in Myanmar and there are high barriers to obtaining ID for those who don't fit into the [135 'national races.'](#)

Building inclusive ID systems

We can help provide identity for all by building inclusive ID systems that link to a country's [civil registration and vital statistics \(CRVS\) system](#).

A CRVS system registers vital events – including births, deaths, marriages, and divorces – on a continuous and permanent basis. An ID system is a logical extension of a CRVS system. Linking these systems has significant benefits:

Universality

A well-functioning CRVS system covers a country's entire population, including non-citizens, throughout the life course of every individual. So, integrating ID and CRVS systems can help ensure vulnerable groups, such as women, children, and the poor have access to proof of legal identity. Without this, they are unable to access the very services designed to protect them.

Security

An effective CRVS system will only register a person's identity at birth, and it will be updated to reflect their current identity credentials as these change over the course of their lifetime. Linking to this data can therefore reduce duplications on an ID register. Since a CRVS system also provides data on deaths, this may be used to remove people from the ID register when they die, which helps protect against identity theft and fraud.

Legal sanctity

A CRVS system provides information and documents that have legal sanctity. This is an essential step to providing people with a legal and secure identity.

Efficient use of resources

Most countries have an established CRVS system, which provides the necessary information to build or strengthen an ID system. A CRVS system is relatively inexpensive to maintain – the World Bank estimates the cost at [US\\$0.50 per capita](#).

Case study: Peru's unique identification numbers

Peru has successfully linked its ID and CRVS systems with a unique identification number (UIN). Each individual receives a UIN when their birth is registered, giving them immediate access to healthcare and other public services. This number is used to validate a person's identity throughout their life.

By law, UINs are the only identification number that can be used on driver's licenses, passports, social security credentials, and tax and military registers. This shows how the country is moving towards an integrated ID management system that's secure, inclusive, and efficient.

Peru's service provision has significantly improved thanks to the link between its ID and CRVS systems. For example, applications for newborn nutritional support now take 72 hours instead of two months. What's more, the proportion of people who receive the support within a month has increased from 36% to 71%.

The National Registry of Identification and Civil Status (RENIEC) is now working on further improvements including electronic ID, digital certificates, and an online 'one-stop shop' where citizens can interact with public institutions.

Challenges and next steps

Linking national ID management with CRVS systems is a fundamental step to providing legal identity for all. But many countries need to strengthen their CRVS systems first to ensure they are universal, accurate, and reliable. [More than 110 low- and middle-income countries](#) do not have a strong CRVS system.

Countries must also support the process of linking ID and CRVS systems by putting adequate resources, technologies, and legal and institutional frameworks in place.

The Centre of Excellence for CRVS Systems has published a new paper – [Linking National ID and CRVS Systems: An Imperative for Inclusive Development](#) – to help governments, practitioners, and other stakeholders build inclusive ID systems. This paper is part of our [knowledge brief series](#) on gender and CRVS, produced in partnership with [Open Data Watch](#).

Coming soon is a much more detailed knowledge resource that will share lessons learned from countries around the world. The Compendium of Good Practices in Linking CRVS and ID Management Systems will be available starting October 2019 at crvssystems.ca/IDcompendium.

Finally, we are also co-hosting a high-level event at the 74th United Nations General Assembly to drive global commitment to strengthen CRVS and ID systems. The event – Civil registration, vital statistics, and identity to leave no one behind – will be held on September 26, 2019 at the United Nations headquarters in New York, run in partnership with the [United Nations Statistics Division](#) and the [Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data](#).